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1838

Hoban, James.

Oration delivered before
the Union and literary
debating society July 4, 1838.



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AN
ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE UNION AND LITERARY DEBATING SOCIETY,

JULY 4, 1838,

BY JAMES HOBAN, ESQUIRE,

A MEMBER.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

PREVIOUS TO READING

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE,

BY AUGUSTUS F. CUNNINGHAM,

A MEMBER.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE SOCIETY.

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ORATION.

ON this day, my Fellow-Citizens, sixteen millions of people in the enjoyment of plenty, peace, and prosperity, inhabiting the extent of this varied and vast republic, hold their political sabbath.

On this day they assemble—through the hills and the valleys, by the ocean shore, and on the mountain top; from the chilly North, where, in the watery chase, the bold adventurer smites the Leviathan of the flood, to that generous and genial South,—

“Where the citron and olive are fairest of fruit,
And the voice of the nightingale never is mute”—

In the halls of public legislation—in the open air—beneath the umbrage of the leafy woods—in the temples raised up in honour of the living God, they congregate—to celebrate the epoch of their birth as a Nation—to pour out their gratitude to the Author of all good for the blessings which he still continues to shower upon them—for the complete success with which, in his wisdom and goodness, he was pleased to crown the labours, the sacrifices, the blood, and peril of their fathers in the season of severest trial, and to bind around the monuments of the brave, the patriotic, the dead, but the *unforgotten*, the fragrant ever green wreath of the People's gratitude.

It is meet that this day should be ever kept holy. It will ever refresh, it will ever profit, to contemplate the truths contained in the Declaration which you have just heard read, and to dwell upon the history of the times in which it had its origin.

As the waters are purest where first they bubble up from the sandy earth, so are the fountains of political wisdom and virtue, which find their sources in the days of the Revolution.

As the Arab loves to linger over the shaded springs of the Desert, so do we over epochs in our history more refreshing than the stream to the traveller thirsting, or rest to the weary.

The Founders of this Nation, the early emigrants, were voluntary exiles from a country in which institutions of gross inequality in their nature and tendencies, had grown grey with the State, and where influences, incalculable in their variety and extent, united to continue them.

In cruel persecutions they had felt the rod of arbitrary power. That power at home they could neither bear nor successfully resist. They brought with them to the New World a temper of mind that could never have worked out its great consequences in the Old. This Continent they found fresh from the hands of Nature, where man roamed abroad upon its surface, stranger alike to the evils of luxury or the advantages of civilization, subsisting by the chase—nor formed into communities—nor crowded into cities. The Sons of the Forest extended to them a generous, confiding, liberal hospitality. Little did they imagine, in their ignorant simplicity, what astounding results were soon to follow the first impress of the footprints of the sturdy Pioneers upon the virgin soil. They had come, perhaps, themselves, unconscious of the magnitude of the enterprise, upon the mission of founding a vast Empire. Here wealth could purchase no indulgences; titles and honours, and the silly pride of family and descent were valueless. The chase or the plough must give them bread or subsistence. The primeval woods would bow their leafy honours only to the axe and the arm strongly nerved and untiring. Their collision with the hostile tribes kept them ever active, and gave their valour constant exercise. Thus were the Colonies planted, thus they grew. Competent to their own support, they soon learned the art of governing themselves.

Trained to enterprise and industry, accustomed to despise hardships, and inured to the discipline into which they naturally fell, of a condition, by necessity, warlike, they arrived readily at the conclusion, that by the tenure of their own virtues, they held the advantages which Providence had accorded to the labours and privations which they had endured. They were the last people on earth to pay ignoble tribute to the vices of a Government which

had driven them upon the pathless seas to seek a home—a Government from which they were separated by a world of waters—and yet still more widely by the dissonance between the habits and institutions of a land fresh, vigorous, and virtuous, and one which had long felt the enervating consequences of wealth to corrupt—of power to intoxicate. Hence the contest which arose was that of pride and the lust of dominion, on the one hand, of unbending courage, and the love of home and liberty, on the other. The legions of the Mother Country were hired with gold, and well provided. The poor Colonists could neither pay, nor clothe, nor feed the fearless defenders of their firesides.

Our enemies were excited by the hope of honours and rewards. *We* were bleeding for our loved families and for our ourselves. *They* trusted for support to the fleets and armies of a great nation. *We* to our consciences, to our God, appealing for judgment upon our motives, to posterity. *They* would bind *us* in fetters. *We* were contending for principles which, in the expansive beneficence of their action, might emancipate the world.

Ours was a cause which, in every heart that could feel, in every soul capable of ambition or generosity, would find a natural advocate. We had seen in the progress of the struggle, what we might expect from the dominion which was sought to be established over us. We saw the lineaments of the despotism we hated in the scathing desolation of war, in the smoking ruins of our homes, in the blood of our murdered brethren. Then, indeed, did the fair face of freedom look brighter and more beautiful. Every Patriot felt, and knew his individual prosperity and happiness to be embarked with the fate of the Republic. Such was our cause. So holy, so just, sustained by motives so lofty! The characters of our eminent men seemed fitted for its advocates.

Where in history shall we find another Washington? His fame, how grand, how pure, how beautiful! It rises in the midst of our history like some alpine height, stretching from earth to sky—draped with the snows freshly fallen from the heavens—in all its vast extent of surface without a spot or stain. How the

heroes of other times dwindle before him. If Alexander astonished by his extraordinary precocity, by a wonderful magnanimity, by a persevering ambition, by the extent and success of a rapid and brilliant career of glory; yet he dimmed the lustre of all by a death, the base consequence of sensual brutality.

If Brutus be remembered as the expeller of Tyranny—the chosen instrument of the institution of Roman virtue and liberty—the avenger of the murdered and chaste Lucretia—yet the Casuist, the Patriot, or the Christian, may pause between horror and approbation when he sentences his loved, his only son, to death.

If Cæsar was eloquent, if he adorned the literature of his country, if he spread the terror of the Roman name, and brought captives and gold to the Capitol, yet a selfish spirit directed every action of his life—he distracted and destroyed—he laid unholy hands upon the Treasury—and, in the Senate, like another Tarquin, fell by the hand of the later Brutus.

If the great modern hero smote the earth with alarm and wonder—made kings and nations tributary—and, from an origin the humblest, ascended to domination almost unlimited—yet the snows of the North drank the blood of those legions, invincible but by the elements—defeat, disaster, and death hewed down his myriads—the barren rock of the ocean received upon its shores, like a drifted weed, the disposer of kingdoms, the master of potentates, its silent, melancholy, lonely exile!

But with Washington no private improbity defaced the living picture of his public virtues. In every relation of life his conduct was proof against the severest scrutiny. During the whole Revolution he received from the Legislature barely the amount of his actual expenditure; his time, his labours, his privations, he considered due to his bleeding country. As the pyramids in colossal grandeur shape their sides in the direction of the cardinal points, so his character, wide-spread and high-reaching, is ever found controlled by the principles of truth and rectitude. In the

darkest hour of our struggle, the confidence of the country shone like a halo around his person. Implicit reliance was always placed upon his firmness, his sagacity, his devotion. When the war ended, his last efforts were directed to avert the arms of his fellow-soldiers, which were threatened to be directed against that freedom which they had been drawn to achieve. His greatness is inseparably identified with the whole Revolution. The same affection which called him to the command of the army remained unabated when he delivered his sword back to Congress, garlanded with victory, and stainless but with the blood of the subdued enemies of human right.

After conquering in the field, to Washington was reserved the added glory of lending the weight of his name and popularity to the greater achievement of uniting us in the still more important measures of peace. His ambition was to bind together our various interests, to render our success complete, our happiness perpetual. Upon the institution of the new Federal Government he was summoned with perfect unanimity to preside over its operations. When the first term of his presidency had expired, again was he called, without one dissenting voice, to the same high station. Every honour which the people could confer still pursued him, retreating into retirement. When he finally abandoned those scenes of public labour, which had consumed so long a period of his existence, like a father parting with his children, he pronounced upon them his affectionate benediction. He wept, not like Alexander, for new worlds to conquer, but tears of warmest gratitude that the people were happy. He pronounced his Farewell Address, overflowing with feeling and full of the most profitable advice. He warns the people against the enemies, under whatever guise, of their continuing prosperity; and beseeches of them the exercise towards each other of forbearance for errors, the sympathy and kindness of brothers, and, above all, he charges them to preserve inviolate the Union. Words of wisdom and prescience from the lips of purity and patriotism.

What are gold and jewels on the brow of royalty to the wreath

which America has laid upon the temples of her first Chief Magistrate? What is the splendor of regal coronation—the dazzling of vain ornaments—the crowding of courtiers—the swarming of the high-born and proud, kneeling at the footstool—the robed and the mitred pouring oil and prayer upon one as humble in truth and as perishable as the very minister who mingles the solemnity of the religion of Heaven with the mockery of the pride of the power of earth, to what America this day presents, where millions of his fellow-citizens unite to do honour to the *virtues* of a man who has long been gathered to his fathers—whose ear may hear no more the benedictions pronounced upon his name—but who lives in the glory of his own great *deeds*, in the memory, in the hearts of his fellow-men. There is a moral grandeur in the perpetual homage which we pay to Washington. Like the fires kept by the vestals of old, it burns unceasingly upon the altar of the heart. A people who can appreciate and reverence with intense and undying affection such a character, and such a man, can never be slaves.

The epoch of the Revolution was redolent, equally, of public virtue and political wisdom. Great men sprung up equal to the emergency which called them forth. “There were giants in those days.” Station the most exalted and the most humble was alike prolific of genius. Every quality of mind was brought into the councils of our country, considerate wisdom, powerful reasoning, burning and beautiful declamation. A common sentiment prevailed throughout the land. We were united by the same origin, by like circumstances attending our emigration and settlement here, by similar institutions, freedom and self-government, the spontaneous growth of our soil and situation, every where prevalent. A blow aimed at one portion of our country was virtually struck at every other. We were in spirit one people, we knew but one cause—the liberty of all. The attack at the North caused immediately the South to arm against aggression. If the rattle of the first musketry was heard at Bunker’s Hill, the thunder of the last cannonading shook the earth at Yorktown. If the snows of a frigid clime were the winding sheet of the early slain, the sands

of the South were stained with the blood of the continued contest. Every State is the scene of some brilliant victory or bloody defeat, where the martyrs in our cause left their bones to moulder. Their silent and scattered remains, with the mute eloquence of the grave, declare how expansive was the patriotism of the Revolution. If thus, at every point, our fathers bled for the common liberty, how dear and inviolable should be that union which gives us a country and makes us a people; that freedom and those institutions which the Union only can perpetuate—an Union rendered sacred by recollections so touching. Withered be the parricidal hand that shall ever be lifted up against it. The monuments, the memory, the ashes, of the dead, the places of trial and glory, that belong to a common soil and history, bind us to the sentiment—the hope of its perpetuity—unholy is the mention, the very thought, of disunion.

July the fourth, 1776, the memorable Declaration of our Independence was proclaimed. The spirit and the glory of our fathers will live forever in that paper. In that Declaration they announce their principles. To support them they appeal not to names, not to books, not to authority, but to human reason, and to that sense of right which belongs to all. They enter upon no hair-splitting disquisitions—but plain, practical, and powerful men, they speak to the head—they speak from the heart. They embody their political creed in few words; they seek not to give it the artificial adornments of studied expression. They say “we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these, are life, liberty, and the search after happiness. That to secure these rights governments are instituted amongst men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter, or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.”

In terms so plain and direct, are conveyed the great truths of political salvation. There are, my friends, in substance, but two kinds of government; to these divisions every form may be reduced; the one sustained by the force of the governor, the other by the free consent of the governed. The Revolution asserted this dogma, that power is legitimate only when instituted by the people, and subject to their control. It asserted the true dignity of man. It reformed the science of government by combining the interest and duties of the maker of the law, with those of him of whom that law enacts obedience to its mandates. The stale and crafty pretext that the people are too ignorant to know, and too debased to pursue, their own happiness, our experience has fully refuted. In other lands the gleaming of bayonets, the tramp of cavalry, the discipline of war, betray the presence of authority; but with us the law asserts its moral dominion—it smites without the sword—it operates like the elements and the seasons with an energy unseen, but every where felt in protecting beneficence. A nation vast and extended as ours, thus submissive to the mere excellence and beauty of her institutions, pleads the cause of human liberty, with an eloquence far more persuasive than can belong to the tongue, or to the pen.

The Revolution achieved for us Independence, both political and personal. The Colonists were actuated not by that idle lust of dominion, which has stained with blood so frequently the annals of the world. Their victories were over nothing great or good. They chained no captive to grace their car of triumph. They sought the establishment of principles, the example of which was to be unlimited by time or country in their operation—to be felt and enjoyed by the whole human family, long after those who enforced their living truth should moulder in the dust. The justice of such a cause animated every bosom. In such a contest we could stand up, erect like men, before the earth, and in the face of Heaven, and with religious solemnity and confidence, invoke the aid of the Omnipotent.

The members of the Congress of '76, in touching language,

pledged to each other, in support of their common Declaration, "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honour." In the simplicity of truth and suffering they declare their grievances: at the bar of the people they arraign anointed sovereignty, they discard the idle sophistry of the constitution of the Mother Country. In the epithet of despot, they merge the sacred appellation of king, and boldly announce "that a prince whose character is marked by every act that may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people."

Such were the men of the Revolution. For them, rank had no awe, wealth no seduction, the bayonet no terror. When the detected spy offered money profusely for ransom, the simple yeomanry replied with scorn, "Briton, put up thy gold." When a bribe was proposed to win the allegiance of a citizen of eminence and poverty, he said, "I am poor, very poor—but poor as I am, the King of England cannot buy me." A sentiment which deserved to have given the form of him who uttered it, to the enduring marble.

These are the fruits of the spirit of genuine Liberty. It swells the heart, it elevates the soul. In whatever age, in whatever clime, midst what people soever, this spirit has prevailed; it has called into activity every virtue that ennobles, every faculty that elevates.

From the free Republics of the east, we have received, after the lapse of more than two thousand years, arts, sciences, and letters, beyond the capability of modern improvement. There the philosophy which enlightened Paganism, teaching in the groves and in the academy, assembled her numerous disciples. There was heard that classic Eloquence—the perfection of style—brilliant and beautiful of diction, magnificent and majestic, moving the heart. There did Architecture rear her marble shapes of grace and proportion, in after-times to be copied in tame servility, but which none will dare to alter, nor indulge the hope to rival. There did Poetry put forth those flowers, whose hue and perfume have not been lost in the lapse of centuries. There did Sculp-

ture chisel her noble models, before the unapproachable excellence of which, man has bowed down in the silence of admiration unutterable. There prevailed those virtues which we seek to emulate, there those heroes of antiquity whom we love to praise.

It was the spirit which had effected all this which our fathers introduced upon this Western soil. Nature and freshness invited her approach. She came, and "lo, the desert smiled." She lifted up her Banner, and the stars of Heaven rejoiced to lend it their radiance—the rainbow its gorgeous hues of hope—beneath it the nations, the people of every clime, hastened to crowd.

The Patriot beheld it and rushed to death beneath its beauteous folds. Unsmitten by the storm of domestic strife—untorn by the iron hail of War—above the smoke and din of an hundred battles, it floated unharmed, until the enemies of our cause sunk in submission before it.

Wherever that Banner is advanced the oak trembles before the axe of the freeman—the forest disappears. The Savage retires at our approach—the wild herds of nature yield to the presence of civilized man. Temples are erected to the great Creator. Our waters are whitened with the sails of growing commerce. Comforts and luxuries are showered like the refreshing rains of Heaven over the whole land. The hills and the vales grow yellow with the ripened fruits and grain of Autumn. The spirit of American Liberty ascends the Alleghany top—she turns her face to the setting sun—and lo! where all before was wild and uncultured the blue smoke curls up from the cabin of the settler—his bright-eyed offspring crowds the places of public instruction—within the period measured by the brief span of a single existence, cities, towns, yea, nations, arise. Oh that I could summon the dead that sleep—that I could reanimate Warren, the first that fell, Montgomery, who in the arms of victory, perished on a foreign soil—that I could bring before us now all who in '76 gave their blood and their services for us and for our children. Oh that they lived but to realize the magnitude of their virtues, the value

of their deeds, in the picture of prosperity and glory which our country this day presents. They could tell you, my friends, what they suffered in the cold of winter when the snow was marked with blood where passed their unshod feet—how they fainted in the summer's heat—how they perished by the sword, by hunger, by privation, in battle, by the horrid diseases of the camp. These, they would tell you, they endured as the price of the Liberty you enjoy. They would tell you, as I cannot tell you, with an eloquence to which even the grave could give no added solemnity, to cling to the precious legacy which they have bequeathed you. Yes, my friends, celebrate this day. Bring your children to the altar, swear them to the support of the principles of the Declaration. Shew them the simplicity and beauty of our Government. Excite in their youthful bosoms, as the only means of preserving our institutions, the same noble virtues to which they owe their origin; accustom them to visit the monuments, to cherish the memory, of our heroes and sages.

Tell them that in this favoured land, where the earth gives forth its fruitfulness obedient to toil and industry, no pampered clergy claim, in the name of Heaven, the tenth of its produce—that no debasing differences are instituted, between men by nature equal, by the accident of birth. That no hireling soldiery is quartered upon them to bayonet them by authority, and to “*eat out their substance.*” Tell them that this they owe to the virtues, the principles, the men of the Revolution.

Long as these principles prevail amongst us will our country continue to shine, fixed and bright as the polar star—a light to the nations—proclaiming to man liberty and regeneration.

Flag of my country! long mayst thou float above the green fields of this happy soil. From the wooden walls of our power may it ever be reflected in the bosom of the deep. It is the brilliant emblem of our union and our greatness—around it is entwined the verdant glory of a thousand victories. When we dishonour it Heaven will dishonour us. Long as the surf beats upon our shores may it hang from the cliffs above its foam. Till

the worlds of light cease to shine in the Heavens may its stars be undimmed. In battle and in peace, in fortunes, prosperous and adverse, as it covered our fathers, so long may it cover, with blessings, us and our posterity.

REMARKS, ETC.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS:

Whenever we are called upon to contemplate the important paper which is about to be read to you, the mind busies itself in speculations, and pleasing reminiscences of history, (for few if any of us were in existence, on the day that it was first read to the people of the then feeble but independent Colonies of Great Britain,) as to the causes which lead to so bold, so unique, so fearless, a declaration of their intentions, which if they had not been guided by the most consummate wisdom, and sustained by the most unflinching bravery and unerring skill, would have been but their own signature to the death warrant for all those, whose names are attached to this first fruit of the labours of our Puritan fathers!

I say our Puritan fathers, because it was the persecutions and oppressions which they suffered and bore in England on account of their religious opinions, that determined them to brave the Ocean, the Savage, the Desert, and the wild beast, to found an empire, where they could worship their God in safety and in peace. From the time they first landed on the Rock of Plymouth, the seed of the tree of Liberty was planted, which has grown to so mighty a size, that its branches now reach from the

Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Frozen Ocean to the Straits of Magellan, and millions upon millions refresh themselves under its shadow, and enjoy its fruits; the influence of whose healthful odours has crossed the Atlantic, and is now operating with salutary effect upon the governments of the Old World. Already do the *legitimate* thrones and palaces of the monarchs and despots of Europe tremble to their foundations as if they would separate and distribute the several parts of which they were composed among their rightful owners. Concession after concession, of usurped privileges, is forced from those who formerly declared that they held their power by Divine right!!!

It is an error to consider the Boston Massacre, the Duty upon Tea, or the closing of the Port of Boston, or any of the many attempts of the British Government to oppress this Continent, as remote or proximate causes of the Declaration of Independence. The Independence of America was an event which could as easily be prevented as the procession of the Equinoxes, or the mighty revolutions of the Planets of the Universe. They were but precursors which tended to strengthen and concentrate men's minds to complete the Grand Design which had been determined upon in the Divine Economy, from the foundation of the world; and when they were fitted and prepared, when those great spirits, great in Council, and determined in the Field, were collected and ripe for the work, the signal was given for action; and that signal was the paper, a copy of which I now hold in my hand.

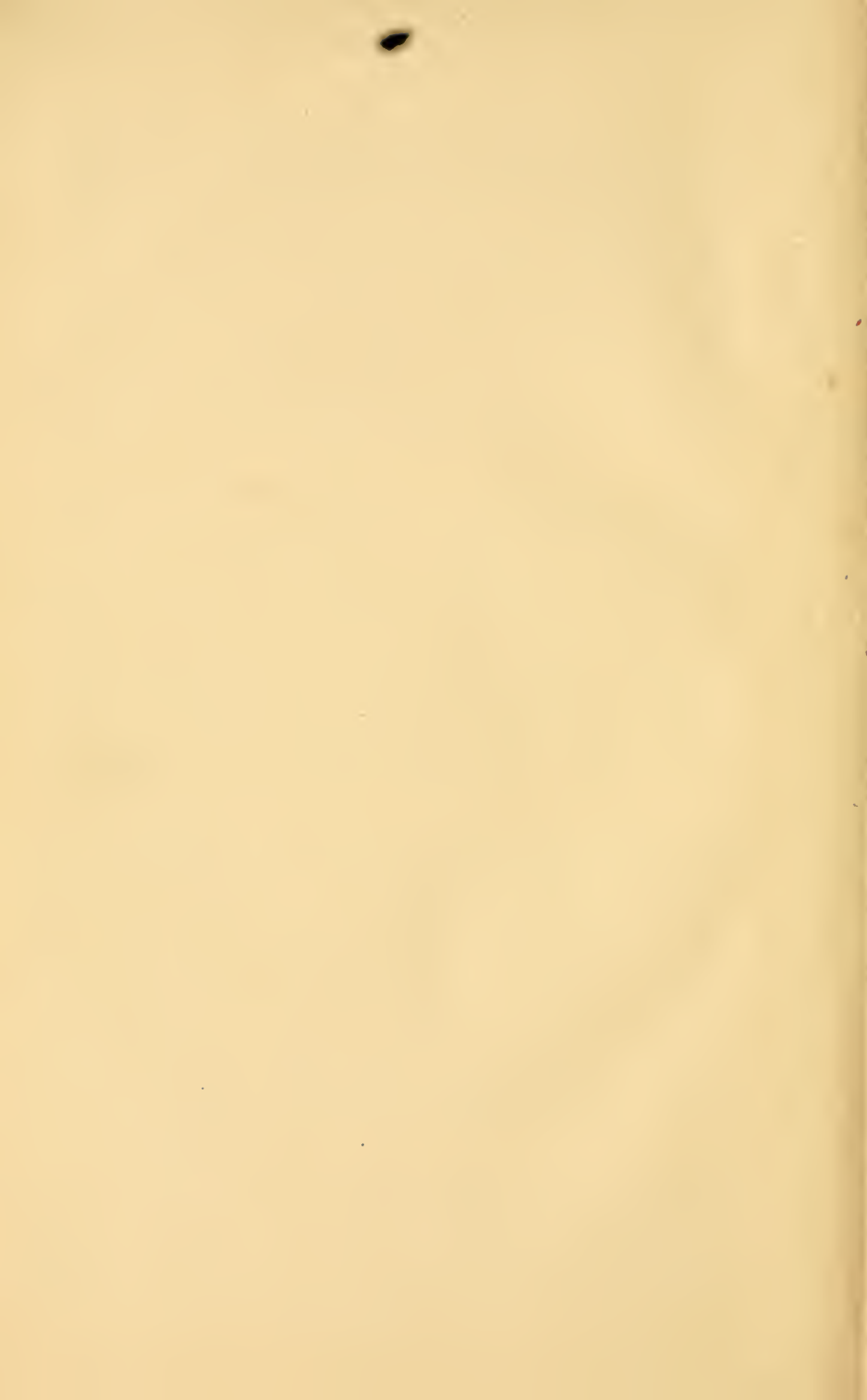
It is now sixty-two years since this invaluable document was first proclaimed to an astonished and doubting world—doubting that man was capable of Self-Government. It was generally believed in Europe, and by many eminent men in this country, that if the restraints of monarchy were withdrawn from man, that instead of increasing in happiness and virtue, we would fall into anarchy and crime. How these doubts have come to nought, let our present position, as a nation, bear testimony. “Unawed by influence, and unbought by power”—for where is power but in the People's hands?—the democracy of this vast country have

steadily pursued the path laid out by the fathers of the American Revolution, and exerting themselves to educate their children, and imbuing their minds with the holy fire of Liberty, and the spirit which actuated them, they have trusted to this much venerated and cherished instrument, which has been to them as a "pillar of fire by night, and a pillar of smoke by day," to guide them through the political wilderness which surrounded them. By its light they have emancipated themselves, and now offer an "asylum to the oppressed of all nations," and the Sons of Liberty of every clime.

It is the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, infused through all our institutions, that has given us such pre-eminence as a nation, and astonished the world with our unexampled progress to maturity. It is its spirit that has called to our shores the wisdom of the Sage, the sagacity of the Statesman, and the energy of the Labouring Classes of other countries, to aid us in beautifying and perfecting our Temple of Liberty. May no narrow policy of our own deprive us of the advantages which such aids supply, and which must weaken those countries from which they are withdrawn!

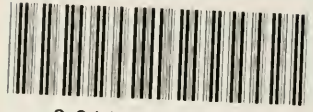
The reading of this Declaration of the object, the principle, and the determination of our forefathers, has been objected to, by some, as tending to keep alive an hostile spirit towards the mother country. With as much propriety might the Heathen object to the Christian's reading the Holy Bible, which is believed to contain the only declaration of the final ransom and salvation of man; and as soon would we expect that the holy Ministers of Religion would lay that sacred Charter aside, as that the American People would cease reading, on this great Sabbath of Liberty, the Declaration of Independence!!

I have only to say, that I conceive it a high mark of the esteem of the Society, to have chosen me to perform the patriotic duty assigned me; and I regret that I cannot bestow upon it that grace and effect which would transport us back, in imagination, to the "TIMES THAT TRIED MEN'S SOULS."





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